

# THE BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE: SPORT AND HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract.** The restrictions imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19 resulted in the switch from in-person to online teaching, including the teaching of foreign languages in 2020-2022. This study uses the feedback of students who have studied English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in virtual and classroom settings. The aim is to investigate the benefits and limitations of each approach for language acquisition in ESP for sport and health sciences. A questionnaire to ascertain students' experiences was distributed to 60 students in sport and health sciences who studied ESP at the Latvian Academy of Sport Education. It was found that online and face-to-face studies of ESP in sport and health sciences tended to facilitate the acquisition of different language skills. In the questionnaire, students reported consistent progress in the study of vocabulary and reading the texts related to their area of study during both online and face-to-face studies, but less improvement was reported in the areas of grammar and speaking skills. Overall, synchronous online live classes would facilitate the steady and continuous development of all language skills if supplemented by continuous support from the teaching personnel, regular offline meetings or classes, and access to specially designed online resources.

**Keywords:** sport and health sciences, online learning, face-to-face learning, language acquisition, tertiary education, ESP

## INTRODUCTION

Online language courses have been offered to learners for at least a decade before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lin and Warschauer (2015) questioned the efficiency and proficiency of foreign language education online, noting the expansion of online language acquisition platforms. They stress that, under certain tests, online and offline learners show comparable progress, validating online studies of foreign languages as a quality alternative for in-person studies (Lin and Warschauer,

2015). Furthermore, Arrosagaray, González-Peiteado, Pino-Juste and Rodríguez López (2019: 31) state that online and hybrid (or 'blended') courses 'offer flexible learning formats for learners of all ages in the way of tailor-made instruction which can adapt to their needs and expectations'. However, certain teaching methods lend themselves better to the traditional face-to-face (F2F) classroom: whereas lectures can be effectively delivered online and in person, group projects, round tables and discussions are formats that are harder to replicate in the online environment (Kravalis et al., 2021).

Restrictions imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19 resulted in the switch from in-person to online teaching, including the teaching of foreign languages in 2020-2022. In spring 2020, neither teachers nor students were prepared for distance studies, a fact noted in numerous studies (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020; Klimova, 2021; Resnik and Dewaele, 2021; Tarrayo, 2022). Hodges et al. (2020: n.p.) outlined the difference between regular teaching by distance and emergency teaching, arguing persuasively that '[w]ell-planned online learning experiences are meaningfully different from courses offered online in response to a crisis or disaster'. Likewise, Gacs, Goertler and Spasova (2020: 380) urged lowering expectations to study outcomes in foreign language teaching in a situation that should be described as 'crisis-prompted remote teaching' rather than online education. However, the teachers compelled to work online gradually adapted their materials and teaching methods to the new teaching environments and media. Likewise, the students acquired new learning and technological skills required for studying in virtual environments. Therefore, by the beginning of 2022, both students and teachers had some experience working online, which resulted in the development of innovative practices, approaches and materials used in the courses. This study investigates the benefits and limitations of studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP) online and in person, using the ESP courses delivered to sport and health sciences students in the Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LASE), Latvia, as a case study.

As elsewhere, online studies have been introduced in Latvia as part of the measures designed to curb the spread of COVID-19 in spring 2020. Higher education institutions began to provide all teaching over distance from spring 2020 until spring 2021, with students returning to the classroom for some subjects or being offered hybrid and blended study formats from fall 2021 until the end of May 2022. In autumn 2021, Latvian universities adopted various solutions to enable the (partial) return of students to the classroom without compromising the health and safety of students and teachers; as a result, in many cases, students continued to study online, especially when it came to theoretical courses, language courses included. This was the case with the teaching of ESP at the LASE, with students learning online from March 2020 until May 2022. What commenced as 'crisis-prompted remote teaching,' to use the expression of Gacs et al. (2020: 380), resulted in the development of new teaching materials and the mastery of new teaching methods by the language instructors, with students likewise adopting their study habits to the new media of language instruction.

In May 2022, the first in-person foreign language classes were conducted at the LASE. In the face of the energy crisis that overtook the world in 2022,

the possibility of tertiary education being provided fully or partially online re-emerged. Under these circumstances, it is important to understand the benefits and limitations of online and F2F language studies from students' perspectives. The present study considers the feedback of sports and health science students who have experienced the study of ESP in online and F2F settings. The objective of this study is to compare the benefits and limitations of learning ESP by sports and health science students online and F2F, to find out if the choice of the teaching environment has an influence on different aspects of their language acquisition. Given the technical advances enabling quality online studies on the one hand and the challenges of the energy crisis on the other, it is likely that online and hybrid ESP instruction will play an increasingly prominent role in tertiary education. Hence, it is necessary to understand which areas of ESP studies can be most effectively transferred to remote teaching and which are better taught in F2F settings.

## ESP FOR SPORT AND HEALTH SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE LASE

The LASE offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses to sports and health science specialists, with foreign languages for specific purposes being taught at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This study focused on the experiences of undergraduate students of sport and health sciences who studied ESP between their first and fourth years of study. The ESP study courses available to sport and health sciences students can be mandatory or choice courses of different lengths and contents, as outlined in Table 1 below.

ESP teaching is different from English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in that the structure and content of the course are built 'on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required' (Saidvalieva, 2021: 481). Kenny (2016: 254) argues that, while there may not be a method for teaching EFL that is radically different from ESP teaching, adapting EFL teaching methods is necessary in view of the learners' background, subject matter and technical vocabulary to be mastered. With these considerations in mind, it is of note that the studies of ESP courses at the LASE are built around the reading and discussion of the texts on the subject to facilitate the learning of English-language terminology on the themes outlined in the courses' programmes, with vocabulary tasks to reinforce and test the knowledge of new terms. Video and audio tasks are used to a lesser extent, and grammar studies are integrated into the materials on other themes. Students also must submit at least one individual written task and prepare and present at least one presentation during each course. The written tasks provide an opportunity to test students' writing skills and their knowledge of grammar so that coursework can be tailored to students' needs (Malahova and Ropa, 2020: 47). Assessment is based on tests that include vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing tasks, and the evaluation of written reports and presentations.

Table 1 List of ESP courses taught at the LASE

Study year and programme	Course title	Hours	Mandatory or choice; content
1 <sup>st</sup> year health science	'Special Terminology'	30 hours	Mandatory course. Themes include parts of the body and body systems, bones, muscles, exercise, verbs of movement, physiotherapy and its methods.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year sport science	'Special Terminology and Communication'	62 hours	Mandatory course. Studied themes are gymnastics, winter sports, track and field athletics, sport games and swimming.
4 <sup>th</sup> year sport science	'Special Sport Terminology'	22 hours	Mandatory course. Focused on themes related to their professional qualifications: sports teacher, coach in a specific sport, recreation specialist and sport manager.
1 <sup>st</sup> year sport science	'Basics of Professional Communication' I & II	10 hours	Choice course. General sport themes, including the Olympic Games, competitions, the training process, sports in the Anglophone culture, etc.
2 <sup>nd</sup> year sport science	'Professional Communication' I & II	10 hours	Choice course. For the themes, see above
3 <sup>rd</sup> year sport science	'Professional Communication' III	10 hours	Choice course. Themes related to the students' bachelor thesis

The ESP classes conducted at the LASE during the pandemic fall under the category of oral synchronous online environments (Meskill and Anthony, 2015: 27-85): the classes were conducted online in real time using the synchronous meeting tools (SMTs) Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) and Skype. MS Teams and, to a lesser extent, Skype, have several features, such as the possibility of screen sharing and of grouping the participants into breakout rooms (MS Teams only), which, as Kohnke and Moorhouse (2020: 296) note in their review focused on Zoom-based synchronous online language learning, facilitate 'authentic language instruction in interactive synchronous classes'. Thus, it could be argued that the sport and health sciences students were receiving ESP instruction in a maximally authentic and interactive setting that the emergency conditions would permit. Self-paced

learning and asynchronous learning were not practiced, and students had to attend live online classes just as they would attend in-person classes. Students had continuous access to study materials that were uploaded to MS Teams rooms or sent by the teacher by email. Additionally, study materials were available in the LASE internal Moodle system. After the restrictions related to COVID-19 were loosened, students returned to the classroom, but individual ESP classes could still be conducted online in real time on a case-by-case basis.

The experience of the sport and health sciences students analyzed in this study is thus different from the experiences examined in other studies of remote language acquisition among tertiary-level students during COVID-19 and of online language courses more generally in that it investigates the acquisition of ESP for sport and health sciences in a synchronous online environment. Previous studies have emphasized the benefits of online studies among tertiary-level students whose primary study subject was foreign languages or the English language. Thus, Apse and Farneste (2021) analyzed the students' experiences with the distance course on English grammar offered in 2020. Manus and Marsden (2017) focused on synchronous written performance in their testing of the influence of L1 instruction on L2 online performance among English-speaking students studying French. However, Resnik and Dewaele (2021) noted that, although levels of anxiety tended to be lower in emergency online EFL classrooms, F2F teaching was associated with higher levels of enjoyment than online studies, a factor that was also mentioned by students surveyed for the present study.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

As part of the study designed to measure the benefits and limitations of online and F2F studies of ESP for sport and health sciences students, a survey was carried out among full-time professional bachelor-level students studying at the LASE. The anonymous survey was distributed to sport science students from years 1 through 4 and to year 1 health science students in the first semester of study year 2022/2023. The survey, drafted in English, consists of 8 questions, collecting information about the students' year of study, their perceived progress in ESP as a result of the course they have recently completed or were about to complete, questions designed to measure the students' progress in specific language areas and skills, the benefits and drawbacks of online studies, and suggestions for improving online and F2F classes.

## DATA AND ANALYSIS

The survey was answered by 60 students from different study years. More than half of the students, 53.5 percent ( $n=32$ ), were second-year students, who studied either the mandatory course 'Special Terminology and Communication' or both

the mandatory and the optional course 'Professional Communication I'. Nearly one quarter of the students, 23.3 percent ( $n=14$ ), were in their first year of study and have received blended online and F2F instruction in ESP in the first semester studying the optional course 'Basics of Professional Communication I' for sport science students or the mandatory course 'Special Terminology' for health science students. Still, 18.3 percent ( $n=11$ ) of students were in their third year, studying the optional course 'Professional Communication III'; these students had studied ESP online in the previous semesters. Finally, 5 percent ( $n=3$ ) of the students were in their fourth year of study and had completed the mandatory ESP course 'Special Sport Terminology' in person; they had studied remotely in their previous study years.

The students were asked to self-assess their improvement in ESP using a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 signified 'did not improve' and 5 signified 'improved considerably'. Only 3.3 percent of the respondents ( $n=2$ ) signaled no improvement in ESP, choosing option 1, and another 8.3 percent of the students ( $n=5$ ) signaled limited improvement, choosing option 2. Most respondents chose options 3 and 4, making moderate to good self-assessed progress (38.8 percent,  $n=23$  for each option). Finally, 11 percent of the respondents ( $n=7$ ) considered they had made considerable progress and chose option 5.

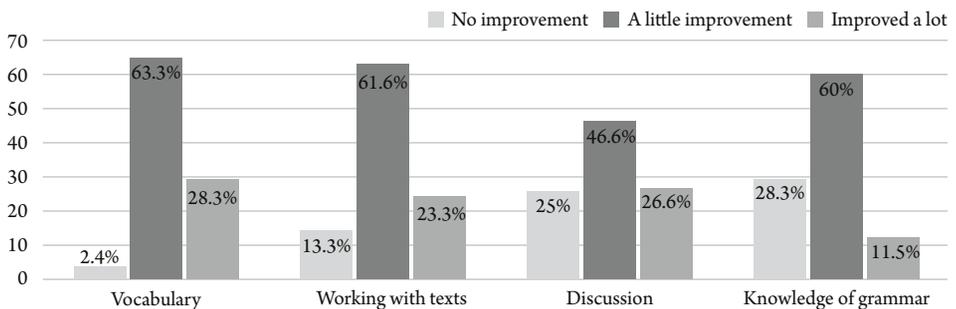
## RESULTS

When asked about improvement in particular areas during online and F2F studies, the students noted improvement in different areas and skills depending on the study mode (online as opposed to F2F). The students were asked to evaluate their improvement in the areas of new sport and health terminology acquisition, working with texts about sports and health, discussion on subjects related to sport and health studies, and knowledge of grammar. As explained above, both mandatory and optional ESP study courses for sport and health sciences professional bachelor students provided by the LASE include activities for facilitating language acquisition in these areas. Students learn new terms in sports and health areas, reinforce this knowledge by performing targeted tasks, work with texts in their study areas, prepare for critical discussion, and improve their knowledge of grammar through completing tasks integrated into the study themes. The students were asked to evaluate their improvement on a scale from 1 to 3, with 1 being 'no improvement', 2 being 'a little improvement', and 3 being 'significant improvement'.

The students were first asked to assess their progress in the areas of professional vocabulary, work with text, discussion and grammar during online classes (Figure 1). It was found that, compared to the other three areas of study, students viewed their improvement in sports-related vocabulary in mostly positive terms. This option received the fewest answers of '1' ('no improvement'), selected by only 2.4 percent of the respondents ( $n=4$ ), whereas 63.3 percent of the respondents ( $n=38$ ) reported

some improvement (option 2), and 28.3 percent of the respondents ( $n=17$ ) noted considerable improvement (option 3). In fact, the area of vocabulary studies received the highest scores for options 2 and 3 and the lowest score for option 1, making it the most developed area in online studies. Another area where students seem to have made good progress during online studies was work with texts, where only 13.3 percent of the students ( $n=8$ ) reported no improvement (option 1), 61.6 percent of the respondents ( $n=37$ ) made a little improvement (option 2), and further 23.3 percent of the students ( $n=14$ ) were certain they could work with texts in their professional areas a lot better than before (option 3).

Conversely, in two further areas, discussion and grammar, online studies are reported as being less efficient. In evaluating their progress in discussions, 26.6 percent of the respondents ( $n=16$ ) selected option 3 ('considerable improvement'), but almost as many students (25 percent,  $n=15$ ) considered they had made no improvement (option 1), and only 46.6 percent of the students ( $n=28$ ) reported moderate improvement (option 2). The knowledge of grammar was the least improved during online studies as compared to the other areas of language study. Only 11.6 percent of the respondents ( $n=7$ ) selected option 3 ('significant improvement'), though 60 percent of the respondents ( $n=36$ ) selected option 2 ('a little improvement'); however, 28.3 percent of the students ( $n=17$ ) considered they had made no improvement in grammar whatsoever, selecting option 1.

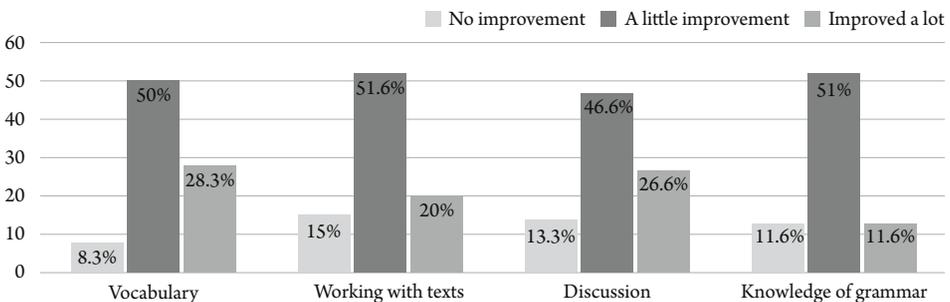


**Figure 1** Students' self-evaluation of improvement in selected language areas during online studies

The next question asked the students to assess their progress in the same areas during F2F studies. The same scale of 1-3 was used for evaluation. Just as in the evaluation of progress during online studies, the most frequently selected option was 2—'a little improvement' (Figure 2). However, the distribution of scores for options 1 and 3 for different study activities differed a little between online and in-person studies. Only 8.3 percent of the respondents ( $n=5$ ) reported no improvement in vocabulary acquisition (option 1), 30 respondents reported a little improvement (option 2), and 28.3 percent of the respondents ( $n=17$ ) chose option 3 ('considerable improvement'). In working with texts, the number of

students who considered their abilities had not improved during F2F classes was somewhat higher as compared to improvement in the same area during online studies. Fifteen percent of the students ( $n=9$ ) noted no improvement (option 1), 51.6 percent of the students ( $n=31$ ) had made a little improvement (option 2), and for only 20 percent of the students ( $n=12$ ), the improvement was significant (option 3).

Meanwhile, discussion and mastery of grammar were the main areas to benefit from the return to the traditional classroom. While 13.3 percent of the students ( $n=8$ ) noticed no improvement in discussion (option 1) and 46.6 percent of the students ( $n=28$ ) considered they had made a little improvement (option 2), 26.6 percent of the respondents ( $n=16$ ) believed they had improved a lot in this area (option 3). This compares positively with online studies, where a higher number of respondents (25 percent of the students,  $n=15$  in the virtual classroom as compared to 15 percent of the respondents,  $n=8$  in the F2F classroom) stated that they had made no improvement. Finally, looking at the knowledge of grammar, it is evident that the highest number of respondents consider they have made some progress, as 21 percent of the students ( $n=35$ ) chose option 2. Still, only 11.6 percent of the respondents ( $n=7$ ) considered that their progress in grammar was significant (option 3), but the number of students who reported no improvement, 5.4 percent ( $n=9$ ), was relatively low as compared to online studies and consistent with the reported outcomes in other areas of ESP acquisition. Thus, the same number of students, 5.4 percent of the respondents ( $n=9$ ), did not consider that their proficiency in working with texts has improved, and only slightly fewer respondents, 15 percent of the students ( $n=8$ ), evaluated their improvement in discussion as non-existent during F2F studies.



**Figure 2** Students' self-evaluation of improvement in selected language areas during in-person studies

The following two questions addressed the benefits and drawbacks of online studies. The respondents could choose up to three options from a list as well as add their own. Some of the benefits concerned organizational aspects of online studies, whereas others were related to language acquisition. Most of the students appreciated the organizational advantages of online studies, mostly

its flexibility (selected by 78.3 percent of the students,  $n=47$ ) and the choice of learning environment (46.7 percent of the respondents,  $n=28$ ). The respondents were also perceptive to the learning benefits specific to the virtual classroom: over half of the students noted positively the use of online resources (58.3 percent of the students,  $n=35$ ) and the possibility to practice language online with the help of interactive quizzes and tests (55 percent of the students,  $n=33$ ). Precisely one half of the students (50 percent of the students,  $n=30$ ) stated that having less stress was an important factor for them, and one student noted specifically that they felt ‘less shy to speak English’ in the online environment. Furthermore, 28.3 percent of the students ( $n=17$ ) appreciated the opportunity to receive individual feedback from the teacher by email or chat (Figure 3).

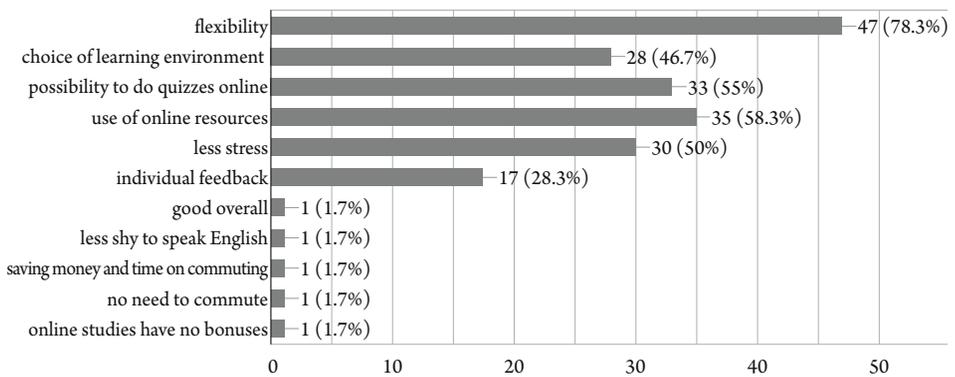


Figure 3 The main benefits of studying ESP online (up to three options)

These findings agree with the conclusions of scholarly literature on online instruction, both in planned and emergency modes. Zhang, Liu and Lee (2021) noted that emotion regulation was easier in an online environment. Resnik and Dewaele (2021), in turn, found that learners experience less anxiety in online settings, but they also experience less intense positive emotions as compared to F2F classrooms. Tao and Gao (2021: n.p.) argue that ‘[d]espite their potential to induce boredom, online classes were also shown to benefit learners’ emotional states by reducing the negative emotions common in offline classrooms, such as foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)’. They also note that ‘[L2 learners]’ emotions may be related to learner and teacher variables, such as teacher friendliness and learners’ previous L2 learning experience’ (ibid.). Shy students and those who are less confident may feel safer in online environments than in a F2F classroom, though there is some evidence that subjective factors, such as the attitude of the teacher and other learners, may influence individual well-being in both online and F2F environments.

In answering the question about the main drawbacks of online ESP studies, the respondents noted above all the technical difficulties that disrupted the learning

process. Most students (73.1 percent,  $n=38$ ) referred to such technical issues as poor Internet access and the lack of adequate hardware (a microphone, headphones and camera). Only 17.3 percent of the students ( $n=9$ ) experienced software problems, probably due to the fact that both MS Teams and Skype have been used for tuition during the pandemic and that instruction in the use of both SMTs has been provided to students early on, which, as Lee (2021: n.p.) emphasized, is essential for ensuring the quality of a task-based course. Online ESP instruction can face psychological as well as technological problems, and nearly half of the respondents (46.2 percent of the respondents,  $n=24$ ) stated one of the main drawbacks for them is decreased personal involvement. This lack of personal involvement may lead to decreased motivation, which, as Tao and Gao (2022: n.p.) warn, could negatively affect academic performance. Furthermore, approximately one third of students (38.5 per cent of the students,  $n=20$ ) confessed that they found it more difficult to understand new material in an online environment. This difficulty may possibly be related to the limited ability to ask questions during an online class, which was highlighted by some of the respondents (17.3 percent of the students,  $n=9$ ). Even more respondents, 30.8 percent of the total ( $n=16$ ), viewed limited or non-existent access to the teacher outside of the lectures as a major drawback. Remarkably, only 3.8 percent of the respondents ( $n=2$ ) were fully satisfied with online ESP instruction, adding ‘good’ and ‘no drawbacks’ as their answer options (Figure 4).

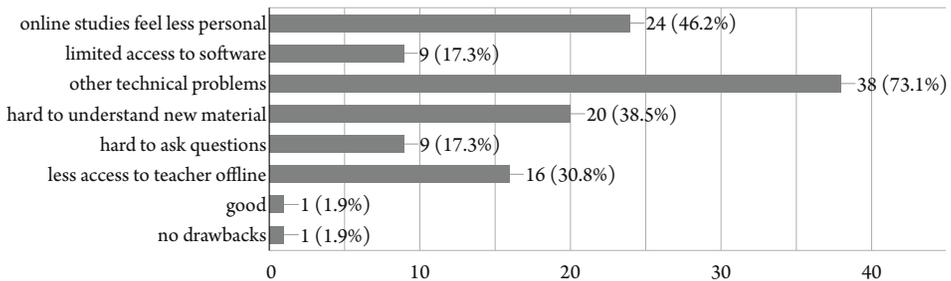


Figure 4 The main drawbacks of studying ESP online (up to three options)

In the two concluding questions, the respondents were asked to provide suggestions for improving online and F2F classes. These responses can be grouped into three categories: the types of materials to be used; pedagogical approaches; and organizational issues. The students suggested increasing the use of video materials and interactive tests, quizzes and vocabulary games during both online and F2F studies. They also suggested using group work to a greater extent, particularly during F2F classes. A few respondents noted that conducting discussions online is more difficult and that speaking online should be carefully orchestrated by the teacher, who would ask students questions and enable each student to speak. In terms of organization, the students preferred receiving study materials by email before the classes; they also preferred individual feedback, ideally by email as well.

The latter suggestion may be hard to carry out in a larger group and may only be implemented to a limited extent. In all, more students expressed satisfaction with F2F classes than with online classes, whereas suggestions for improvement were more numerous and more detailed for online classes.

## DISCUSSION

Comparing the results of students' evaluations of online and F2F classes, in-person studies appear to be slightly less efficient in terms of vocabulary acquisition than online studies. This could be explained by the fact that vocabulary quizzes online are more popular among students than quizzes on paper, as the respondents also noted in their suggestions for improving the classes (see also the discussion of the final two questions, below). Accordingly, Demir and Sönmez (2021: 684) note that the game element is an important constituent of English language instruction among Generation Z students. Similarly, Kravalis et al. (2021) argue that individuals born between the late 1990s and 2010, the so-called 'digital natives' or Generation Zs, are particularly receptive to new learning tools and environments and prefer visual materials, especially videos and other multimedia, to traditional work with texts. It has also been argued that the factor of 'edutainment', or the combination of education and entertainment, is in demand among Generation Z representatives, who currently constitute most undergraduate students (Kravalis et al., 2022). Moreover, online studies make the use of video materials, to which learners can be directed for self-paced studies, more accessible. Teng (2022) found that multimedia, characterized by diversified modalities, palpably influences the learning of new vocabulary. Meanwhile, Teng warns that learners should be instructed and guided in the use of specific sources of multimedia, suggesting that teachers should provide instructions for selecting videos unless the learners are provided with video materials. Teng (2022) also highlights that video sources not only accelerate the acquisition of vocabulary, but also enhance the students' confidence and enable them to plan their own study process and efficiently study at their own pace. It is thus possible that the use of online vocabulary quizzes and games during remote classes facilitated improvements in vocabulary among the sport and health sciences students who completed the survey.

Additionally, the results of the survey show that these students found grammar instruction to be less efficient when conducted online. More students considered that their knowledge of grammar did not improve during online tuition than during F2F classes:  $n=17$  online as compared to  $n=9$  in F2F classes selected option 1, 'no improvement'. One explanation may be that, as sports and health specialists, they are less oriented towards grammar acquisition than the learning of new vocabulary and the reading and discussion of texts in their areas of study. Likewise, it is possible that the materials and methods used for online grammar tuition were less efficient and that finding other materials would help ESP learners improve their knowledge of grammar.

The reported learning outcomes of working with texts on the themes of sport and health in online and F2F environments show little variation by medium of instruction. Arguably, reading texts and performing text-based tasks are very similar, whether conducted in class or on one's own in front of a screen. Other studies suggest that students prefer using printed materials instead of reading from screens for various reasons, including the fact that they can scribble their notes on the page and that their eyesight suffers from looking at a screen for prolonged periods of time (Klimova, 2021: 1789). In the case of the LASE students, this difference between online and F2F studies is likely to be less noticeable, as in most cases the students could still use library textbooks or print out the materials that had been sent by the teachers in advance.

Meanwhile, a comparison of students' evaluations of their progress in speaking skills and their knowledge of grammar shows that the online medium can be somewhat less well-suited for ESP acquisition when it comes to grammar and discussion. Scholars outline the limitations of using SMTs for discussion among language learners. Accordingly, Salomonsson (2020), considering self-modified output by learners in an online environment, notes that this differs from F2F interaction since SMTs do not support simultaneous speech. The need to take turns in online communication results in the disruption of spontaneity and can have an inhibiting effect on learners (Zhang, 2021), undermining their enjoyment of the discussion activity (Resnik, 2021) and of the ESP course itself.

Overall, pre-pandemic studies highlighted the fact that certain language skills and aspects of language study can be taught online as efficiently as in person, while others were harder to teach online. Ekmekçi (2015) found that grammar and vocabulary could be taught efficiently online, and students were satisfied with the content delivery, whereas writing and speaking tasks were harder to conduct online and yielded less satisfactory results. The survey offered to the sport and health sciences students did not target the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking specifically, but rather their relation to the four areas of study emphasized in the ESP course delivered to professional bachelor students at the LASE. Speaking skills could be developed in the course of discussion on the study themes, but given the technological and psychological constraints of online media (the need to speak in turns, lack of access to quality microphones and cameras, inability to see body language and gesture fully or at all), the improvement in sports- and health-related discussion, as reported by students, was lower for the online study mode. Students also struggled with understanding and mastering new materials, especially in the field of grammar, where the absence of any progress was reported more often in the online environment than in F2F studies. However, improvement in working with text (which encompassed reading and vocabulary tasks) and acquisition of new terminology were similar for online and in-person studies.

When analyzing students' suggestions for improving online and F2F studies, it was noticeable that students are aware of different teaching methods that could be more appropriate depending on the environment. Accordingly, one student

suggested using lectures more frequently in the online setting, while another student recommended focusing on group work and group projects in the F2F classroom. Djumabaeva and Avazmatova (2022) emphasize the use of genuine communication activities in the EFL classroom and point out that social aspects, discussion and collaboration make the F2F classroom a unique learning environment.

## CONCLUSION

The pandemic resulted in a temporary switch to remote study in areas where only F2F instruction was previously offered, including ESP courses at the tertiary level for full-time students. Initially an emergency measure, it was quickly appreciated for the numerous benefits it brought to both learners and teachers, both in terms of logistics and in terms of language teaching and learning. Students appreciated the possibility of having access to a wider range of material and receiving immediate feedback when completing online quizzes and tests, as well as the possibility of exploring previously unknown or inaccessible online resources, such as databases and online libraries. However, certain areas of language studies did not benefit from the transfer to an online environment: for ESP courses that focus on sport and health subjects, finding appropriate grammar resources online and developing new ones is challenging. At the same time, the use of grammar materials designed for F2F classrooms is likely to yield suboptimal results. What is more, it seems that sport and health sciences students struggle with understanding complicated themes, including certain topics in grammar, in the less personal setting of the Internet, where their problems are less likely to be noticed and where they have fewer opportunities to ask questions. Likewise, discussion in online environments is impeded by technical problems: breakout rooms do not always work, and assigning students to these rooms is time-consuming. The need to take turns when speaking imposes a new protocol on communication, which may be liberating for shy students but may also bring less enjoyment to others.

The outcomes of this study are consistent with the findings made by scholars who compared online and F2F language studies both before and during COVID-19. In the case of the pandemic, it is necessary to bear in mind that emergency remote education cannot be compared to planned online education, but that, over time, students and teachers adapted to the situation. The number of participants in the present study was limited to those students who had experienced both online and F2F instruction and may not be representative. It would be thus desirable to extend this study to ESP students studying sport and health in tertiary education in other countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and the Scandinavian countries. At present, it seems that a blended format, where students have some classes conducted online and others on campus F2F, would provide the best approach. In a F2F environment, students would be able to conduct discussions and receive some instruction in grammar, whereas the tasks related to working with texts and building vocabulary related to sports and health science can be efficiently conducted online.

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## APPENDIX 1. SURVEY SAMPLE

This anonymous survey is designed to measure your experience of studying English for specific purposes online and in person. The survey will take about 5 minutes. Please answer the questions as fully as possible based on your study experience.

- 1) What is your year of study?
  - a. 1st year BSc
  - b. 2nd year BSc
  - c. 3rd year BSc
  - d. 4th year BSc
- 2) Did your knowledge of sports and health-related terminology improve as a result of the course?

Likert scale 1-5, with 1 – did not improve, 5 – improved considerably

- 3) How do you evaluate your improvement in the following areas during online studies?

Area of study	1 – no improvement	2 – a little improvement	3 – improved a lot
Vocabulary			
Working with texts			
Discussion			
Grammar			

- 4) How do you evaluate your improvement in the following areas during face-to-face studies?

Area of study	1 – no improvement	2 – a little improvement	3 – improved a lot
Vocabulary			
Working with texts			
Discussion			
Grammar			

- 5) What are the main benefits of studying foreign languages online? (choose three)
  - a. flexibility
  - b. choice of learning environment
  - c. possibility to do quizzes and test online
  - d. use of online resources (videos, online libraries, etc.)
  - e. less stress
  - f. other (write your own answer)

- 6) What are the main limitations of studying foreign languages online? (choose three)
  - a. online studies feel less personal
  - b. access to software or difficulty in using certain software
  - c. technical problems, such as lack of access to good Internet, adequate devices (headphones, camera, microphone)
  - d. difficult to understand new material distantly
  - e. inability or limited ability to ask questions directly
  - f. limited access to teacher offline or outside lectures
  - g. other (write your own answer)
- 7) What could be done to improve the teaching of language courses online?
- 8) What could be done to improve the teaching of language courses face to face?

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